

Broadcast Journalism: Podcast Explainer

Students will develop a plan for a series of podcast episodes covering a specific topic. They will then produce at least three episodes of that project, writing a script for each episode. Each episode should be between 10 and 15 minutes in length. Included in both the scripts and produced episodes should be appropriate introductions, interviews, sounds, and other components.

Specific Parameters

- You will need to produce three episodes of your podcast.
- The podcast episode needs to be between ten (10) and fifteen (15) minutes long. It cannot be more or less than this.
- You are doing this on your own, but you can invite other students in the class onto your show as special guests that you will interview or just talk with about your chosen topic.

Step-By-Step Process

There are four basic steps to completing this assignment. They are as follows:

1. Plan (Pre-production)
2. Produce (Record)
3. Edit (Post-production)
4. Submit (Turn it in)

STEP ONE: The first step — **Plan** — is possibly the most crucial. You need to develop an idea or concept for what you are going to be talking about. Then you must make sure you stick with that idea or concept throughout the entirety of the assignment. Start by brainstorming to help give your project focus. Write out a few notes to yourself describing your overall concept. Be sure to hit all angles (sense of purpose, audience, context, statement of purpose, strategies, medium, arrangement, production, and testing).

Before you get started with your podcast, you need to make a few decisions. You need to **determine your goal**. What's the **topic** of your podcast? For example:

- News report
- Poetry recital
- Excursion report
- Interview
- Review (*movie, music, book, restaurant, etc*)
- Current events discussion
- Other

Like most written documents, initial planning is essential — you'll want to do an outline, storyboard, or some kind of design plan to lay out how you will arrange material to achieve your purpose. Your written script does NOT need to be word-for-word, but rather an idea of each topic covered and how long it takes on the podcast. You should also include notes on any background music or noises you will incorporate in each section. Any music or sounds you include must be copyright free (*the [Penn State Media Commons Free Media Library](#) might be helpful*) or you must have the rights to them. Therefore, **before** recording, it's a good idea to:

- write an outline
- collect any information you plan on using . . . this means research your topic; don't just start talking and hope the information will magically appear in your head
- create a folder and put all the audio clips you need in the one place on your computer

You need to keep the **audience** in mind:

- Who would be most likely to listen to the podcast?
- Is it everyone at Sterling College?
- Is it parents or community members?
- Is it the general public?

Determining who exactly the audience is should help focus the podcast.

The podcast will need a **name**. The more creative, the better!

In preproduction, you must also decide upon the **format** for the podcast:

- Who will actually be heard in the recording?
- Should you have a host? Multiple hosts? Multiple speakers?
- What segments do you plan for the show?

STEP TWO: The second step — **Produce** — is one you are familiar with. It is the recording phase. You need to find a quiet place and record your episodes. Keep in mind we have a complete podcasting set up in the media lab. If you want to use that, let me know. We can work out the logistics of getting your time with it.

Practice what you are going to say. The recording will be a much quicker process if you do this first.

The episode should contain the following, so make sure you have recordings for all of it:

- 00:10 intro theme song
- 00:20 welcome
- 00:30 announcements & preview of episode
- 08:30 interview/topic/discussion/etc.
- 00:15 thank yous & farewells
- 00:15 outro theme song

It's best if you **record short portions of audio at a time**. You then have less chance of messing up what you intend to say. When the portions are played right after another, the listener won't realize that some things were recorded separately.

Record the introduction last for a couple of reasons:

- First, recording last allows you to introduce exactly what will be in the podcast because it has already been recorded.
- Second, you will have had practice in front of the microphone and are more comfortable. You'll record a much better introduction, and, after all, the introduction should hook the listeners!

STEP THREE: The third step — **Edit** — is where you need to really take your time and pay attention to the details. First and foremost, be sure your episode follows the structure outlined in Step Two:

00:10 intro theme song
00:20 welcome
00:30 announcements & preview of episode
08:30 interview/topic/discussion/etc.
00:15 thank yous & farewells
00:15 outro theme song

So, after recording, it's time to **edit the audio**. You may not have recorded the audio in order, so the first priority is to make sure all audio is arranged properly. Also, clips can be trimmed to delete any unnecessary pauses or interruptions.

Music and sound effects can be added in post-production. If you use music, be sure it is "podsafesafe." Podsafesafe music is the term for music that can be legally used in a podcast and freely distributed online for others to download.

Refer to the [Penn State Media Commons Free Media Library](#) if needed. Remember to give the artist credit for the music, if possible.

Once the recording is exactly as you want it, **export** the file as an MP3.

STEP FOUR: The fourth step — **Submit** — is the easiest. Upload your MP3 to the LMS. Do so by the time and date listed on the assignment in order to be eligible for the maximum number of points available. Sometimes our LMS doesn't handle audio files the easiest. You have a couple options. Turn the file into a .zip file or upload it to a private YouTube channel and submit the link. If you make a "video" out of your podcast for YouTube, just put an image into the editing timeline to take up the entire time of your podcast. You can always ask questions about this.

Topic Ideas

Need some help with coming up with a topic? Here is a list of suggestions. These certainly aren't the only possibilities, and some of the suggestions may not even be applicable to you. You can always use some of the generic suggestions listed previously in this document. These are just here to be of assistance if you need it.

- Re-enact famous speeches and historical events
- Broadcast current event
- Reciting math terms, problem-solving, and formulas
- Math problem of the week
- Step-by-step instructions for math
- Weather predicting activities
- Science fair project reports
- Radio station simulation broadcasting
- News broadcasts
- Commercials for ads
- Review games
- Memorization techniques
- Teacher recording a lesson
- Record guest speaker
- Book discussion
- Book review
- Digital storytelling
- Reciting vocabulary
- Reciting spelling
- Learning sounds and ABCs, etc
- International pen pal podcasting to communicate
- Publishing oral presentations
- Speech corrections
- Oral history of a significant event
- Foreign language vocabulary
- Language studies
- Mnemonics reminders
- Test review
- Put notes on podcast
- Spelling tests
- Educational television shows
- Fluency, rehearsal
- Self-introductions, descriptions
- Homework assignments
- Word of the day
- Quote of the week
- Writing assignment prompts
- Progress on project

Tips About Writing Podcasts

Writing narration for a podcast is really about writing words for the ear. Use short sentences, but vary their length. Stick to one idea per sentence when possible. Make each new idea flow logically out of the previous one. Make sure your audio flows.

- Check everything you write by reading it aloud. A sentence might look just fine on paper, but it could read awkwardly in the studio. Always check what you've written by reading to yourself aloud or preferable to someone else.
- Write conversationally as if you were speaking to the one individual listening to you.
- Use contractions and an informal tone. Don't be afraid to use fragments or end your sentences with a preposition.
- Make sure that all text can be easily understood and read aloud. The best way to test audio scripts is to read them out loud before attempting to record them.
- Write everything the way someone would say it, not the way someone would read it. Write out symbols and abbreviations so the voice-over talent will know what was meant to be read.
- With numbers, write out one through nine. Use numerals for 10 through 999. Write out words like thousand and million. Use the appropriate combination of names and numerals for numbers like 22 million.
- Write out names for symbols. When recording the audio, "dollars" is easier to read than \$.
- If an acronym or an abbreviation appears in a script, make sure that the full name appears first.
- Audio scripts allow the injection of personality into programs. Since the narrator is an actual person, writers can use inclusive terms like "we" or "our", creating the illusion that the narrator is viewing the program along with the user. This makes the program much more alive and less dry. Such qualities always help to put the user at ease. Using the method, the narrator can act as an actual guide.

Final recommendations

Remember, I make clear that I will respond to you within 24 hours of receiving your e-mail. *This means that "panic mode" should set in at least 26 hours before the assignment is due if you want a response with a few hours to spare. ;)*

This assignment requires preparation. You must find time to interview subjects when they are working or it is polite to contact them. Use discretion.

When you contact people as a student you are (inadvertently) representing our institution, our department, and me. Be sure to leave them thinking, "golly they were professional!"